

AMIT PELED: AMERICAN LANDSCAPES

TUESDAY, JULY 11 | 4 PM | NEWPORT ART MUSEUM

This concert is made possible through the generous support of **Sue Klau**.

Amit Peled, cello
Solomon Eichner, piano

GERSHWIN arr. Nicholas Canellakis **Three Preludes for Cello and Piano**
I. Allegro ben ritmato e deciso
II. Andante con moto
III. Agitato
(Approximate duration 7 minutes)

FLORENCE PRICE **Adagio for Cello and Piano**
(Approximate duration 5 minutes)

TRADITIONAL **"Motherless Child"**
(Approximate duration 4 minutes)

COPLAND **Waltz and Celebration**
I. Waltz
II. Celebration
(Approximate duration 6 minutes)

BARBER **Sonata for Cello and Piano, Op. 6**
I. Allegro ma non troppo
II. Adagio - Presto
III. Allegro appassionato
(Approximate duration 18 minutes)

INTERMISSION

HERBERT **Cello Concert No. 2, Op. 3**
I. Allegro impetuoso
II. Andante tranquillo
III. Allegro
(Approximate duration 19 minutes)

JOSHUA BORNFIELD **The Broadway Cello Fantasy**
(Approximate duration 15 minutes)

George Gershwin (1898-1937): Three Preludes for Cello and Piano

George Gershwin's Three Preludes are his only known surviving works originally conceived as solo piano pieces. He wrote at least six preludes, and there is speculation that there may be more yet unpublished extant in the Gershwin family archives. At a recital he gave in New York in

1926, Gershwin played five *Preludes*, which were probably these three plus two pieces that he sometimes billed as *Novellettes*. The music that begins the finale of his Piano Concerto was originally sketched in 1925 as a *Prelude*.

Gershwin worked over these pieces for a long period of time, and he, at last, fixed them in final form for publication in 1927. He dedicated them to his friend, Bill Daly, a Harvard-trained musician who was a great help to him in acquiring the craft and the technique he needed to apply his extraordinary natural talent to work in larger musical forms than the popular song.

Each of the three preludes is generally based on a single persistent rhythmic figure, melodically varied, and extended. The first and third *Preludes* are quick and jazzy, *Allegro ben ritmato e deciso*. *Prelude No. 2, Andante con moto e poco rubato*, is blues derived.

Florence Beatrice Price (1887-1953): Adagio for Cello and Piano

The early 20th century African American composer Florence Beatrice Price spent her professional career in Chicago, where, because of her extraordinary musical talent and her family's affluence, she was able, notwithstanding her race and her gender, to study at the Chicago Musical College and the American Conservatory; further, she enrolled at the New England Conservatory in Boston, where she majored in organ and piano. After graduating with two degrees, Price worked as a college professor, a church organist, and a theater accompanist. Price wrote more than 300 musical compositions. Some of her works have been lost, and others are still unpublished, but some of her piano and vocal music is increasingly being performed today.

In the 1930s and early 1940s, music groups sponsored by the WPA in Illinois and Michigan performed some of Price's longer works. Price's groundbreaking *Symphony in E minor* was the first prize-winner of the 1932 Rodman Wanamaker Music Contest and was premiered in 1933 by Frederick Stock and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. She was the first African American woman to have a symphony performed by a major American orchestra. This Adagio is an arrangement of the slow movement from her string quartet.

Motherless Child

The origin of this African American spiritual is difficult to establish, but the first time a mention of it occurs is in *Old Plantation Hymns* by William Barton (1861-1930). Barton lived in the South from 1880 to 1887, and there, he heard enslaved people singing spirituals. He particularly mentioned "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child" and inscribed its melody and words, even though the song then survived primarily through the oral tradition.

The African American spiritual song, "*Sometimes I Feel Like A Motherless Child*," is likely to be familiar to listeners. It is haunting for its evocation of loneliness and hopelessness and evokes the era of slavery when it was quite common for children of slaves to be sold away from their parents. Frequently heard during the time of the Civil Rights movement, the selection has many variations and has been often recorded. It always expresses pain and despair as, in it, the singer compares his own hopelessness to that of a child who has been wrested from his parents. In one interpretation, the repetition of the word "sometimes" offers a measure of hope, as it suggests that at least "sometimes" the singer did not feel like a motherless child.

The sadness conveyed is complex: many enslaved people felt the sense of being a "long way from home" as being far away from their native Africa and also as being forcibly separated from

family and friends. The song also could be understood as articulating a longing for death, which would be another “home,” which many saw as their only way to escape.

Aaron Copland (1900-1990): “Waltz” and “Celebration” from *Billy the Kid*

Ballet first became popular in the United States in the 1930’s; in 1936, Lincoln Kirstein organized Ballet Caravan for American choreographers, dancers, composers, and designers, who until then had only limited outlets for their talent. In 1938, Kirstein commissioned Aaron Copland to write the music for his company’s most ambitious production, a ballet about Billy the Kid, a murderous villain of the frontier, who somehow had transformed into a folk hero. Kirstein wrote the book and Eugene Loring created the choreography and first danced the title role.

Copland worked on the score in Paris, in New York, and at the MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire and completed it in 1938. The music is written very much in the manner of Copland’s early works, in which the themes are thoroughly analyzed and subtly varied. In *Billy the Kid*, he frequently used well-known authentic Western folk songs for his thematic material. In 1939, he made a concert suite in several movements of *Billy the Kid* that uses about three quarters of the music of the original ballet. William Steinberg and the NBC Symphony Orchestra first performed it on November 9, 1940.

Copland based *Billy the Kid* on an actual person, William Bonney, who was born in Brooklyn in 1859, and was one of America’s favorite bad guy heroes. Billy, who became a notorious and even mythic figure, was tall and attractive and had a friendly manner. He died at the age of twenty-one after murdering twenty-one people. The composer described him as “a legendary character, a young innocent who went wrong, part of the picturesque folklore of the Far West, not the monster he was.”

When Copland fashioned a *Suite* from the original score of the ballet, he did not include Billy’s “Waltz” in it. The dance of the outlaw and his sweetheart is often performed as a single movement in the version Copland arranged for small orchestra. Copland conceived of this selection as a kind of Wild West *pas de deux*. “Waltz,” written in 1938 and revised in 1946, originally followed Billy’s escape from jail and portrayed his last dance with his Mexican sweetheart.

In “Celebration” (After Billy’s Capture), a drunken celebration occurs. Billy, who appears first in prison, makes one of his legendary escapes. In this selection, which depicts the celebration after the capture of the famed outlaw, the music begins quietly, but happily. Eventually a drunken brawl erupts. Copland includes phrases from authentic cowboy songs and rhythmic, dissonant music to underline the brawl’s action.

Samuel Barber (1910-1981): Sonata for Cello and Piano, Op. 6

Samuel Barber was one of the most distinguished members of the generation of American composers who came to maturity shortly before the Second World War. He began his musical studies when he was only six years old, and at seven, he was already composing. At fourteen, he entered the Curtis Institute of Music, and at twenty-one joined its faculty. Barber’s music follows the traditional musical technique he learned at Curtis, but that conservative training did not prevent him from composing works of great fantasy and expressivity. His compositions are rich in texture, free in rhythm, and always melodic. He wrote two operas, two symphonies, three concertos, and many other compositions in various other musical forms.

An early violin sonata that won Barber a generous cash award from Columbia University financed one of the first of his many sojourns in Europe; during the summer of 1932, he and Gian Carlo Menotti, his Curtis classmate and close friend, explored Germany, Austria, and Italy together. Barber began to compose his *Cello Sonata* during their nine-day walking trip from Innsbruck to the shore of Lake Como. In the space of two weeks, he had written the first movement and part of the second. He finished the work in Philadelphia that November. He submitted it to a jury that then granted him the Prix de Rome. The sonata was soon accepted for publication by an established firm in New York, which would publish Barber's music throughout his life. The *Cello Sonata* was Barber's first work as a non-student professional composer. He inscribed the score, with a backward look, to his teacher, Rosario Scalero.

Barber's mature gift for extended and grand Romantic melodies and his characteristic rhythmic liberty are already evident in this early composition. Brief cadenzas add to the demands placed on the players, and the part for piano, which was Barber's instrument, is at least as difficult as that for the cello. There are three movements: the first, *Allegro non troppo*, is in traditional sonata form, using romantic harmonies. The second movement begins with an Adagio that incorporates a scherzo, *Presto*, as a long, contrasting central section. The music returns to the slow beginning tempo but not as a repetition, rather more as a completion of what was begun and had not yet finished. The last movement, an *Allegro appassionato*, is a series of connected variations on a theme.

Victor Herbert (1859-1924): Cello Concert No. 2, Op. 3

When Victor Herbert composed his second cello concerto in 1894, he was approaching the apex of his career as both a cellist and composer. The fact that he composed a cello concerto with an intimate knowledge of the instrument and his own playing in mind is of substantial importance to this chapter. He composed the piece after his immigration to the United States, having already written and premiered prior pieces for the instrument with orchestra as part of a prolific solo and orchestral performing career. Meanwhile, he was quickly gaining invaluable conducting experience with various New York orchestras under mentors like Anton Seidl and was developing a deep interest in the idea of composing large-scale vocal works using his experience and affinity for opera. So, by the time he started writing his second cello concerto in 1894, not only was he blending a wide array of musical styles, but he was also bringing in his varied musical perspectives as a cellist, conductor, composer, and orchestral player.

Victor Herbert's Cello Concerto No. 2 is scored for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, four trombones, strings, and solo cello. The work is approximately 25 minutes in length and features three distinct sections, *Allegro impetuoso*, *Andante tranquillo*, and *Allegro* -- that form one continuous larger structure; each section is related with overarching themes. This clever cyclic structure creates a unified concerto out of only a few motives. While the concertos of Schumann and Saint-Saëns have the same fast-slow-fast, continuous structure, neither connect their melodic material as much as in the Herbert.

Joshua Bornfield: The Broadway Cello Fantasy

Joshua Bornfield is a composer, performer, educator, and arts advocate based in Baltimore, Maryland. He has had works commissioned by organizations as varied as Washington National Opera and wildUp. He has won awards for his orchestral, choral, and chamber music. Bornfield regularly performs with multiple choral and vocal ensembles such as critically acclaimed chamber ensemble Third Practice, Handel Choir of Baltimore, The Choir of St. David's Church (Baltimore), and both NEXT and Peabody Renaissance Ensemble of the Peabody Institute. He

directs the War Memorial Arts Initiative, an arts equity & advocacy program supported by Baltimore City's Department of General Services.

The Broadway Cello Fantasy is a musical journey through the history and diversity of Broadway musicals, as seen through the eyes of a cellist. The work is inspired by the composer's love of musical theatre and his experience as a performer and educator in Baltimore, a city with a rich theatrical tradition.

The work consists of four movements, each exploring a different aspect of Broadway music. The first movement, "Overture", sets the stage with a lively and energetic introduction that showcases the virtuosity and expressive range of the cello. The second movement, "Ballad", is a tender and lyrical piece that evokes the romantic songs of classic musicals such as *West Side Story* and *The Phantom of the Opera*. The third movement, "Comedy", is a playful and humorous piece that draws on the comic elements of musicals such as *The Producers* and *Spamalot*. The fourth movement, "Finale", is a dazzling and triumphant piece that celebrates the diversity and vitality of contemporary musicals such as *Hamilton* and *Dear Evan Hansen*.

The Broadway Cello Fantasy is a tribute to the artistry and creativity of Broadway composers and performers, as well as a showcase of the cello's versatility and potential as a solo instrument. The work invites listeners to enjoy the music of Broadway from a new perspective, while also discovering new facets of the cello's musical personality.

Amit Peled



Praised by *The Strad* magazine and *The New York Times*, internationally renowned cellist **Amit Peled** is acclaimed as one of the most exciting and virtuosic instrumentalists on the concert stage today. Having performed in many of the world's most prestigious venues, including Carnegie Hall and Alice Tully Hall at the Lincoln Center in New York, the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington D.C., Salle Gaveau in Paris, Wigmore Hall in London, and the Konzerthaus Berlin, Peled has released over a dozen recordings on the Naxos, Centaur, Delos, and CTM Classics labels. He is on the faculty of the Peabody

Institute of the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, and has performed in and presented master classes around the world including at the Marlboro and Newport Music Festivals and the Heifetz International Music Summer Institute in the US, the Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival in Germany, International Musicians Seminar Prussia Cove in England, and Keshet Eilon in Israel. Embracing the new era of the pandemic, Peled has established the Amit Peled Online Cello Academy reaching out to cellists all over the world. Moreover, his home studio in Baltimore has turned into a virtual art gallery promoting and supporting local artists while teaching and livestreaming to a worldwide audience.

Raised on a kibbutz in Israel, Amit Peled began playing the cello at age 10. He is represented worldwide by CTM Classics. For more information, visit www.amitpeled.com.